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CHIEF CORNPLANTER, KI-ON-TWOG-KY OR GYANTWAHIA

The relationship of the whites to the Indians all too frequently has been a record of duplicity and bloodshed and massacre throughout American history. Pennsylvania has provided more than one outstanding exception. The pioneer Swedish and Finnish settlers on the Delaware were instructed to deal fairly and honestly with their Indian neighbors and thus established the foundations of a Pennsylvania tradition. Too well known to need comment are the contributions of the Quaker Founder William Penn, to the furtherance of this practice. The last chapter in the history of Pennsylvania Indian policy was written many decades later, and while it is not wholly without another side, it is still a story of an attempt to preserve peace and friendship in the relations of white men and red men. It is written in the life of Chief Cornplanter, variously known as Ki-on-twog-ky, John Abell, John O'Bail and Gàiantwaka.

This famous and picturesque Indian leader so intimately associated with Pennsylvania history was born somewhere between 1732 and 1740, distinguished authorities still argue the date, at Conawaugus on the Genesee river in New York. He was the half-breed son of an Indian trader, John Abeel, and a Seneca woman of the better class. Abeel, the father, was the son of a prominent family of Dutch extraction which had produced many prominent leaders. There was every reason, therefore, why Indian John Abeel would establish himself as a leader among his people.

The position which Cornplanter came to occupy among the Iroquois in general and the Senecas in particular was one which came to him as a result of sheer ability and strength of character. He was not by descent a chief or leading man of the tribe. He was a prominent leader of the unofficial class and won the right to represent the Six Nations even in treaty negotiations. He was accustomed as a result to move among his people on a plane of perfect equality with those who under other circumstances would have been considered his superiors, and who were that in terms of tribal connections and customs.

Cornplanter, evidently so-called because of his devotion to persuading his people to develop the arts of peaceful agriculture, did not appear always upon the stage of history as a friend of the Americans. According to several accounts and his own assertions he was a leader in the defeat of Braddock near Fort Duquesne in 1755. At that stage of his career he was a fiery and very youthful brave bent upon distinguishing himself in battle. During the American Revolution, his attitude toward the Americans was no more pacific. In the course of bloody raids upon the Pennsylvania frontier, it was Cornplanter who frequently assumed the lead, according to a majority of historical accounts. In a letter to the Governor of the Commonwealth many years later he denied any evil intent, writing, "I myself was opposed to joining in the conflict, as I had nothing to do with the difficulties that existed between the two parties." The delinquency of the Indians he attributed to the fact that "Great Britain requested us to join with them in the conflict against the Americans and promised the Indians land and liquor."

Whatever the shortcomings of Cornplanter during the years of the Revolution, there can be no questioning of his assistance in settling the complicated Indian relations of the new Republic. Once the struggle with Britain was concluded, hardy pioneers began to push to the west and establish a new frontier. Especially attractive were the rich lands of the Genesee country in New York and the contiguous sections of northwestern Pennsylvania where large land companies early laid out schemes for settlement. These had been the prized hunting grounds of the Six Nations and their sylvan home for generation upon generation. The once powerful confederacy had yet to feel any weakening of its powers and its chieftains were inclined to view themselves as still lords of the wilderness.

Although the actual power of the Iroquois to resist white encroachments was very limited, potentially in view of the growing signs of bitterness upon the part of their brethern in the Ohio country the followers of Cornplanter and Red Jacket were in a position to determine the fate of the western frontier. Their alliance with the

western Indians might have altered greatly the early history of the West, and delayed immeasurably the development of southern New York and northern Pennsylvania. The lives of thousands of pioneers hinged upon the successful settlement of the Indian problem. It was a major domestic concern of the critical years following the American Revolution.

History records that probably the outstanding statesman in meeting this issue was not a white man but Cornplanter, chief of the Senecas. For the pertinacity with which he sought, in the face of bitter opposition from powerful leaders of his own people, to secure a peaceful adjustment of the inevitable conflict between the aboriginal holders of the rich lands of the new west and the aggressive pioneering instinct of a new nation, Cornplanter deserves this designation. Statesmen are those who rise above the hatreds and animosities of the moment and project their minds into the future seeking an ultimate solution to problems. Cornplanter belongs definitely within this select group. Less farsighted leaders sought to lead his people into a policy of senseless and stubborn opposition which could have had but one ending - the annihilation of the Iroquois. The mind of Cornplanter foresaw this result and visioned another solution - peaceful bargaining in an effort to preserve his people and for them a small portion of the lands over which they once possessed complete dominion. Such a policy was not an easy one to adopt, for the whites were grasping and unappreciative and the authorities at New York and Philadelphia were not always able to see that the solemn provision of treaties were observed in their entirety. It was a policy of subservience and pursued at a terrible cost in pride and self respect, but it was the only policy which could preserve the remnants of the Six Nations from complete extinction.

Thus it is that the history of Indian relations during the years from 1784 to the turn of the century is filled with the record of the influence of Chief Cornplanter, son of a white trader and a high born Seneca woman. It was the hand of this powerful war chief of the Senecas, now using the arts of peace, which was so much in

evidence in manipulating behind the scenes the treaties of Fort Stanwix in 1784 and Fort Harmar in 1789 providing settlement of land problems and Indian relations.

During the years from 1790 to 1791 Cornplanter earned the everlasting gratitude of Pennsylvania through his heroic effort in checking the development of an eastern Indian confederacy in alliance with Ohio brethern. In 1790, the Cornplanter visited Philadelphia to protest against white inroads upon the Iroquois lands. Washington he characterized as "town destroyer," recalling the disastrous effects of the Sullivan expedition upon his people. His people, declared Cornplanter, "continually ask, 'where is the land which our children, and their children after them, are to lie down upon?' " At the same time the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania and Governor Mifflin received the Seneca chief, and assurances of protection were forthcoming.

The following year Cornplanter acted as agent of the United States in endeavoring to cultivate peace and friendship with the western Indians, Conferences on the Ohio and at Painted Post in New York failed to produce the peace designed by Washington throughout the Indian country. Only the devastating campaign of Pennsylvania's "Mad Anthony" Wayne was able to convince the western Indians of the folly of resistance to the white man's advance. Cornplanter's efforts, however, were successful in keeping the Iroquois from joining the allied tribes.

While engaged in these efforts, Cornplanter still found time to endeavor to advance the cause of peace and education at home. In 1791 he established contact with the Society of Friends and asked for a Seneca mission. "We wish our children to be taught the same principles by which your fathers were guided. Brothers! We have too little wisdom among us, and we cannot teach our children what we see their situation requires them to know. We wish them to be taught to read and write, and such other things as you teach your children, especially the love of peace." These were words of wisdom indeed.

At Buffalo Creek in June, 1794, and at Canandaigua the same October and

November the Federal government held its last councils with the Six Nations as a confederated power. Provision was made for the further distribution of lands and the path of civilization smoothed for the eastern frontier. Again it was the calm advice of Cornplanter which triumphed over that of less cautious leaders. It was in 1796, in grateful recognition of his many services to peace and friendship, that the Pennsylvania Assembly under date of March 16 granted perpetually to the Indian statesman a section of land on the upper Allegheny in what is today Warren County. The grant was officially designated as "Planter's Field" and Cornplanter's town was "Jennesedaga."

In 1802 Cornplanter visited Thomas Jefferson at Monticello. As an advocate of the practice of the arts of agriculture and the promotion of education and temperance among his Indian followers he had won the attention of this great humanitarian, now President. Jefferson extolled his work and urged him: "Persuade our Red Men to be sober and to cultivate their lands; and their women to spin and weave for their families." This in fact had become the life mission of the once powerful war chief of the Senecas.

Cornplanter's devotion to his new allegiance was never more fully exemplified than in his march to Franklin, Pennsylvania, in 1812 with two hundred warriors whom he sought to enlist in the defense of his country against Great Britain, once his ally in battle. His services were declined, but several Cornplanters distinguished themselves as scouts and the son of the aging chief was commissioned in the United States army.

The remainder of Cornplanter's life was lived after the manner of a patriarch and sage. Surrounded by the remnants of his people and his New York neighbors, he presided with kingly distinction over "Jennesedaga." The Rev. Timothy Alden of Meadville visited him in 1816 and leaves us with a picture of the man and his surroundings. "Jennesedaga," CORNPLANTERS village, is one a handsome piece of bottom land, and comprises about a dozen buildings. It was grateful to notice the

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agricultural habits of the place, and the numerous enclosures of buckwheat, corn and oats. We also saw a number of oxen, cows and horses, and many logs destined for th saw-mill and the Pittsburgh market," wrote the famous divine.

To one who saw him still later in 1835, he appeared "aged and venerable" and seated "beneath the wide spreading shade of an old sycamore, on the banks of the Allegheny." Time and hardship had made dreadful impressions upon that ancient form. Cornplanter himself now reckoned his age as well over the century mark. A year later on February 18, 1836 the venerable warrior of the Senecas passed to the happy hunting ground which had been denied him on earth. For nearly a hundred years he had witnessed the pageant of history unfold in eastern North America. The land upon which he spent his declining years and where his grave is located, gratefully marked by special act of the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1866, is historic indeed. His remains and his people are entitled to the perpetual care of Pennsylvania. It is to be hoped they may never be forced by neglect or omission of duty to abandon their native state.